

## Restaurant review: Orana

FRANK GRENFELL | 14 NOVEMBER 2014



RESTAURANT REVIEW | Restaurant Orana is rated among the nation's most unique and one of South Australia's best restaurants, and nearly a year after its opening we finally secured a seat.

The fact that it is still booked out each night is a good sign and must be extremely satisfying for ambitious chef Jock Zonfrillo, who made headlines when he left the upgraded Magill Estate Restaurant shortly before its re-launch. He set up Street/ADL and followed it with Restaurant Orana upstairs in what used to be Universal Wine Bar on Rundle Street.

While Street dabbles with more popular native produce in a bar setting, Orana aims to create a truly Australian cuisine in a fine-dining setting. It is an admirable ambition for a Scottish-born chef who moved to Australia in 2000 following a multi Michelin-starred career in England.

Visiting on a Friday night, we begin with a quick aperitif at Street, before being met by a friendly waiter and walked back out the front, around the side and up a set of stairs. Upon entering the small lounge area, we are greeted by name.

Seated at one of the six tables set up for the night, we are then poured a glass of 2005 Gaston Chiquet champagne and delivered short spiel about what to expect.

There is no view, no grand chandeliers and no extravagant flourishes. Instead, the fit-out is light, clean, modern and largely unremarkable - the only real distinguishing feature being a large mural on the back wall.

Wine fridges line the far wall of the L-shaped room, a hefty wooden bench serves as a waiting station, and the tables are set sparsely.

Nothing in the setting in any way over-shadows what diners have been queuing up for - native cuisine.

It is a true degustation, at \$295 for matched wine, with more than 20 individual plates of food over the night. There is no menu, just the question of whether you would like the degustation with matched wine or juice. The kind staff introduce themselves and help you to settle in.

It isn't long before the first of the tasters is delivered: a tiny branch of crispy saltbush sitting in sour cream. It is lively, bitter and salty - an amazing first-up mouthful that dances on the palate.

From there, we move through plate after plate of wonderfully presented mouthfuls of food.

There are diced chunks of clam meat dusted with a sprinkling of dorrigo pepper, which has an anaesthetic-like quality much like a Sichuan pepper.

A fine sliver of pumpkin tastes amazingly like roast beef, and a smoked Goolwa cockle served in a spoon is basic but wonderful.

A dehydrated beef tendon is so gelatinous it sucks the moisture out of the mouth, but the rich and exquisite flavours are balanced by a slightly sweet dust of macadamia and quandong.

But the highlights of the more than 10 tasters delivered over the course of about an hour are the smoked beetroot and the macadamia soup.

A slice of darkened beetroot, rolled into a cigar, comes out propped in a bowl of stark white goat's curd. The beetroot is earthy, chewy and wholesome, the tartness of the goat's curd providing a wonderful contrast. The dish is one of my favourites of the night. Perfect textures and deep simple flavours – it is flawless.

The second highlight of the starters is a soup which is a salty yet almost sweet. A chef informs us it is a simple mixture of macadamia and almond milk. Again, it is uncomplicated, but the balance between the sweet and salty and rich and creamy is something special.

The starters are an amazing selection of hors d'oeuvres – the only let-down being the lack of a refill of the wonderful champagne that is the perfect accompaniment.

Next up is a palate-cleansing foraged salad of native leaf, peas and cinnamon myrtle. Crisp and clean with a slightly citric dressing, it is balanced off with a nice glass of Italian white of an unfamiliar pecorino grape which carries a good acid and lemon notes.

From there, we enjoy a delicate broth of kingfish and numerous varieties of seaweed – some crispy, some bitter. It is an enjoyable bowl of complex flavours and textures.

Then comes a heavy dish of rare-cooked kangaroo with a mountain-pepper butter. It is extremely rich and, while kangaroo can be an acquired taste, the mountain-pepper butter does a good job of rounding off the palate. It is well matched with a full-bodied Argentinian malbec.

The meals come out in good time, while the service is attentive and extremely well briefed. Our waitress, Greta, is jovial and has obviously tasted the entire menu.

Occasionally one of the chefs will serve the course, giving a personal run-down of what went into the dish and explaining where the native ingredients are sourced.

The most visually stunning dish of the night is a simple tail of marron which sits in the middle of a blue earthenware plate. However, it is also the biggest disappointment of the evening. The marron is lightly brushed with Geraldton wax – the result being that the overwhelming flavour of citronella overpowers the tender crustacean and is quite unpleasant.

It is a minor blemish as we move on to a more traditional dish of lamb and potato puree with ruby saltbush, which is superbly done. The lamb is tender and rare, with creamy potato and a sweet jus. The native succulent adds a wonderful texture, and it is washed down with a Coonawarra cab sav.

Next is a palate-cleansing combination of unpasteurised goat's cheese with an apple cider before two weird and wonderful desserts.

The first is a native currant puree with the most amazing coconut sorbet – an outstanding contrast of tang and sweet.

The second is buttermilk, set like a panna cotta, with eucalyptus and a strawberry-style soup. Eucalyptus can be overwhelming, but this is a treat – just a subtle hint behind the creamy buttermilk and the tart sauce.

It is a wonderful finish to a remarkable night. We finish the meal not bursting at the seams, yet having been on the most extraordinary journey through more than 20 dishes.

The only real comparisons to Orana in Adelaide are Magill Estate and Celsius – but Orana sits in a league of its own on a national stage.

Sometimes the food may seem like it's made by chefs, for chefs. The techniques are many and varied, the effort devoted to each individual morsel astounding – so much so, one has to wonder if many diners fully appreciate the quality and time that has gone into each dish.

The journey is one every foodie should experience. Unique is an over-used description, but Zonfrillo's Orana is just that.

Considering our multicultural gastronomic culture which is all too often boiled down to pie floaters and frog cakes, this restaurant should be celebrated for using local and indigenous ingredients in nearly every dish.

It is typical of Australia, and indeed Adelaide, that it takes someone from another country to show us how good we have it. And in doing that, there is no doubt that Zonfrillo has realised his most lofty of aspirations in Restaurant Orana and has pioneered a truly Australian cuisine.

Five out of five



**Orana**

285 Rundle Street Adelaide

*Open: Lunch on Friday; dinner Tuesday-Saturday*

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